

International Congress of Myriapodology in Serbia: 20-26 July 2025

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The 20th International Congress of Myriapodology was held in July 2025 at Srebrno Jezero (Silver Lake) in Serbia. Silver Lake is an oxbow lake of the Danube that has been dammed off with a small but growing holiday resort on the west side. The Congress took over a hotel where most delegates were staying, with more in neighbouring hotels and hostels. Some 85 delegates from a wide range of countries including Australia, Chile, South Korea, USA, Thailand and right across Europe from Bulgaria, Italy, Greece to Scandinavia attended the congress. Several friends of BMIG were there including Thomas Wesener, Stylianos Simaiakis, Maike De Voogd and Henrik Enghoff, all of whom have attended meetings over the years. Plus Hans Reip, Norman Lindner and Per Djursvoll who went collecting with BMIG in northern Spain.



The format followed that of previous congresses with two days of talks, a full day excursion and a further two days of talks. Themes for the talks included physiology, taxonomy and ecology of both millipedes and centipedes.

Organised by Dragan Antić, supported by his students and colleagues, the congress was notable for having a young feel with a good number of new researchers and students. Some myriapod research groups were well represented such as that of Bruce Snider from Georgia, USA and Daniella Martinez-Torres from Colombia who both brought numerous students with them. There were perhaps fewer older people than previous congresses.

As usual we all learnt something new and surprising about our animals. Ruttapon Srisonchai (Tol) who works on the very special dragon millipedes spoke about a new genus of these species (*Alternaxytes*) that exhibit heteropody. This is where legs on the diplosegments are alternating in length, long and short, something that is very obvious to see. Although it is not known why this might be advantageous reasons discussed included that it might be a method of avoiding the legs bumping into one another or to help the animals cling on to a surface and climb as they are found on limestone rock walls.

Another highlight was a short film shown by John Seifert of *Scutigera coleoptrata* mating. The male circulated the female before forming a T shape, positioning at right angles to the female. The male then bobs up and down before depositing a spermatophore and then actively pushing the female over it.

Scutigera coleoptrata was the subject of another fascinating revelation. Andy Sombke introduced us to 'explosive' leg regeneration where entire legs can grow back within one moult and within 7 days if it has been lost at the right moment in the moulting cycle. Andy revealed that you can remove 12 legs from an individual and they can all grow back at the next moult!

An interesting new technique was outlined by Sydney Irons who used fluorescent powder as a method for marking millipedes. After establishing that there was no impact on animals in captivity and learning where on the millipedes the powder was retained (on the sterna in a Parajulid and under the paranota in a Polydesmid) a field study in mesocosms demonstrated that after two weeks sufficient of the powder remained on the animals for them to be distinguished from unmarked animals.

We were treated to several talks about South American millipedes where we were able to admire photographs of Glomerodesmida (slug millipedes), Cryptodesmida and the fast running and jumping Stemmiulida. With the finding of a Siphonophorida at the Eden Project in Cornwall perhaps some of these engaging millipedes might yet turn up in the UK!

Each topic or session was started off with a longer keynote talk before shorter talks by other delegates. Nesrine Akkari had the unenviable first slot at the congress with her key note talk and spoke about the importance of natural history collections in museums and the taxonomy carried out there. Nesrine highlighted that there are too many taxa and too little time and stressed that taxonomic revisions are the 'gold standard' of taxonomy - work that is not usually high profile and attention grabbing but essential to take forward our knowledge. She also introduced me to the FAIR principles of data management and sharing and pointed out that these should be applied to taxonomy. I.e. the data should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reuseable.

Of interest to those in Britain concerned with conservation was a talk by Peter Decker, President of CIM who has been working with a team on the Red List of Myriapods for Germany. Several methods were used in an attempt to identify rare and threatened species including expert knowledge (a meeting where each taxa was discussed), an analysis of those species found in red listed biotope types and a statistical analysis using linear regression to highlight trends for those species with sufficient data (including about 34,000 observations of centipedes and 61,000 for millipedes, which is all on www.edaphobase.org). As a result, 6% of centipedes are considered endangered and 12% of millipedes. Peter's interesting conclusions included the point that expert knowledge was essential and that the opinions of the experts were always proved correct by the data.

The 40 posters were exhibited in the main conference room so we could browse during coffee breaks at our leisure. Topics expanded considerably on those of the papers with examples of educational work in Budapest Museum by Eszter Lazányi and two on pauropods in Serbia (Dragan Antić and Klaus Hasenhuütl) and Austria. The best poster award was won by Jéhan Le Cadre with his remarkable work on millipedes preserved in amber which included the option of wearing 3D glasses to view illustrations.

At the end of the congress was the general assembly of the Centre International de Myriapodologie, the International organisation that co-ordinates the congresses. At the meeting a new logo (in Olympic colours) was launched along with new website www.myriapodology.org which is well worth a look and includes an online literature database for myriapoda. At the assembly there was also an update on MilliBase (www.millibase.org) which gives details of the taxonomy, distribution, type localities and literature for each species of millipede and Myriatrix (www.mriatrix.myspecies.info). ChiloBase (www.chilobase.biologia.unipad.it) is also being updated.

The congress was a great opportunity to reconnect with old friends and to meet new researchers in a friendly atmosphere. As well as the formal scientific sessions social opportunities included a welcome reception and a party on the last evening. The excursion was an opportunity to visit some of the amazing archaeological sites in eastern Serbia followed by a boat trip back along the Danube in the evening. As we were all staying close together the whole congress was very convivial and much easier than being in a big city; the warm weather was matched by the warm atmosphere! The added bonus was the opportunity to swim each day in Silver Lake after the formal part of each day was over and explore some Serbian ‘street food’ at lunch times.



Peter Decker, President of CIM giving his address at the General assembly



Conference poster



Delegates on a boat on the Danube during the excursion